The Maharshi

MAR/APR 2002 VOL. 12, NO. 2

My Life and Quest

By Arthur Osborne

The following are extracts from the new publication, My Life and Quest, *the autobiography of Arthur Osborne. The manuscript for this book was long buried among other writings and recently made available to Sri Ramanasramam for publication by his daughter, Katya Douglas. Copies are now available at Arunachala Ashrama (see page 7).*

THERE IS ONE FLANK of the mountain where the ascent is sheer, with no pleasure groves to rest in on the way, where, to compensate for this, the path is direct and the crest already visible from the plains below and throughout the ascent. This is the direct path taught by Bhagavan. There are no stages on this path.

It was about 6 o'clock one June morning in 1956 that the first awakening to Reality occurred. I was alone in the room when I awoke and sat up in bed. I just was — my Self, the beginningless, immutable Self. I had thought 'nothing is changed'. In theory I already understood that it is not anything new; what is eternal cannot be new, what is new cannot be eternal. The only description is what Bhagavan has given: "It is as it is." Only now I experienced it. There was no excitement, no joy or ecstasy, just an immeasurable contentment, the natural state, the wholeness of simple being. There was the thought: 'It is impossible ever to be bored.' The mind seemed like a dark screen that had shut out true consciousness and was now rolled up and pushed away.

I do not know how long this experience lasted. In any case, while it lasted it was timeless and therefore eternal. Imperceptibly the mind closed over again, but less opaque, for a radiant happiness continued. I had my bath and shaved and dressed and then went into the sitting room, where I sat down and I held the newspaper up in front of me as though I was reading it, so that no one would see the radiance. I was too vibrant with happiness really to read. Why did I want to hide the radiance? Why did I not shout and dance with joy?

* * * *

A person's whole life is a path he treads, leading to the ordained end. If at some point it becomes consciously so, that is the great blessing which makes achievement an envisaged goal.

* * * *

It is dissatisfaction with the false that leads a man to seek the true. When asked why one should seek Self-realization, Bhagavan has been known to answer: "Who asked you to? If you are satisfied with your present life, stay as you are. But many people become dissatisfied, and when you realize the Self your discontent will vanish."

* * * *

As I have already explained, outer activity is useful on Bhagavan's path, but it should be aloof activity which keeps the mind working smoothly on the surface while underneath the current of meditation can continue. Emotionally involved activity, on the other hand, is harmful, since it turns the mind outwards, absorbing it in the activity and thereby

impeding spiritual progress.

* * * *

Once Bhagavan has taken up a person, his destiny becomes more purposeful, is speeded up, so to say. From a worldly point of view this may be for good or ill; prosperity may be needed for one's development, adversity for another.

* * * *

The purpose of meditation is to steady the mind and prevent it jumping and chattering like a monkey by holding it to one thought. If you suspend its activity without the one thought, that is still better. If it becomes too restive the best way of controlling it is either by an act of Self-enquiry, turning steadily to see whether it really exists or not, and what it is that exists, or by an act of faith and submission, resigning yourself to keep still and let the Unknown take charge.

* * * *

Restricting activity is like trying to kill a tree by picking off the flowers and fruit; attacking the *vasanas* is like breaking off the branches; Self-enquiry is like uprooting the tree.

The worst method is to try to destroy the *vasanas* by gratifying them. That has the opposite effect, like trying to put a fire out by pouring oil on it.

* * * *

It is not actions that impede one's *sadhana* nor spiritual strife, but the *vasanas*, that is the deep-seated desires or tendencies giving rise to the actions. Indeed *sadhana* is sometimes represented simply as the elimination of *vasanas*, since it is these which turn the mind outwards, fling one into unnecessary activity, and drag the consciousness back to rebirth after this life has finished. Aloof or routine activity which does not nourish the *vasanas* is harmless; only emotional activity is dangerous.

* * * *

Indeed after coming to Bhagavan I never prayed for anything, except sometimes for greater energy and determination on the quest — and that prayer is part of the quest itself. Not that there is anything against prayer in the sense of request. If a man makes physical and mental efforts to attain his desires it is only sensible to make spiritual efforts also. But the man who follows the direct path of Self-enquiry is striving to dissolve the ego that has the desires, so how can he at the same time pray to gratify them? It would be contradictory, going against his own efforts, however high or unselfish the desires may seem to be. He simply lets things come as they will, asking to whom it is that they come.

* * * *

Even the path of devotion and submission leaves no place for prayer in the sense of petition if it is wholehearted as Bhagavan demanded. Asking is not submitting. If one is totally submitted to the Will of God, the only prayer that remains is 'Thy Will Be Done'. And since one knows that God's Will is always done, whether one prays for it or not, even that becomes redundant. All one can say is: "I surrender myself to You; do as You like with it." And beyond even that comes the attitude: 'There is nothing to surrender. All this is Yours. I surrender only the false idea I had that it was mine.'

* * * *

Retirement did not mean a life of hobbies and gentle pottering, but only of a more complete dedication, more constant effort. Indeed it is dangerous for one on the quest to retire from life in the world too early. If the mind is not yet capable of holding daylong to the quest, it is better for it to have some surface activity such as professional work. Failing this, it will find relief in some trivialities, daydreaming, imagination or erudition, or

THE MAHARSHI is a free bimonthly newsletter edited by Dennis Hartel and Dr. Anil Sharma and distributed in North America by Arunachala Ashrama, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center. For those with Internet access, this issue and all back issues are available at "http://www.ramana-maharshi.org/publish/newslet2.htm".

Books, videos and audio CD and tapes on Sri Ramana Maharshi can also be found on the Internet at "http//www.arunachala.org".

fall into some false kind of half-sleep, half-trance; in some way its keenness will be impaired.

* * * *

The mind is like a mill grinding the thoughts that we constantly feed into it in an unbroken though ever-changing flow. It doesn't care whether grave or trivial so long as it is kept constantly supplied. And at night, in dreams, it chews over the cud of what was supplied to it by day. Nearly all this activity is wasted energy. It prevents concentration and does not really clarify one's mind. And all of it is based on the very assumption one is trying to destroy, of an individual being who decides and acts. So I began instead to suspend thought, refusing to feed anything into the mill, retaining only pure consciousness — and, of course, observation of things happening. The mind was allowed to deal with anything requiring thought as and when it arose, but not prefigure it before it arose or re-enact it after it was finished. I was surprised how simple and what a relief this was and wondered why I had not started doing it systematically long before; and then it occurred to me that without a good deal of previous meditation it would not have been feasible. Until it has been brought well under control the mind abhors a vacuum.

* * * *

Therefore what has to be done is to submit, take life as it comes, let things happen, while at the same time striving to wake up from it all. As long as it is taken to be real, the dream cannot be recognized as one and therefore there is no awakening.

Pundit and Peasant

Once during a visit to the Ashram in the 1940s I was sitting outside the Old Hall with many devotees, facing Sri Bhagavan who was reclining on a couch. A group of learned pundits were discussing certain passages from the Upanishads with great enthusiasm and profundity. All, including Bhagavan, appeared to be attentively listening to this interesting discussion when, all of a sudden, Bhagavan rose from his couch, walked thirty meters to the north, and stood before a villager who was standing there looking lowly with palms joined.

Immediately the discussion stopped and all eyes were turned to Bhagavan and the villager standing at a distance. They appeared to be conversing, but at such a distance no one could tell about what. Soon Bhagavan returned to his couch and the discussion resumed.

I was curious about this villager and why Bhagavan had gone out of his way to meet him. So, while the discussion continued I slipped away and caught up with him before he left the Ashram. I asked the villager what he and Bhagavan had talked about. He said that Bhagavan had asked him why he was standing there so far away. "I told Bhagavan, 'I am only an ignorant, poor villager. How am I to approach you who are God incarnate?'"

"What did the Maharshi say then?" I asked.

"He asked me my name, what village I was from, what work I did and how many children I had, etc."

"Did you ask Him anything?"

"I asked Him how I could be saved and how I could earn His blessings."

"What did He tell you?"

"He asked me if there was a temple in my village. I told him there was. He wanted to know the name of the deity of that temple. I told Him the name. He then said that I should go on repeating the name of that deity and I would receive all the blessings needed."

I came back to Bhagavan's presence and sat among the devotees listening to the learned discussion, in which I had now lost all interest, realizing that the simple humility and devotion of this peasant had evoked a far greater response from our Master than any amount of learning. I then decided that, though a scholar by profession, I should always remain a humble, ignorant peasant at heart, and pray, like that villager, for Bhagavan's grace and blessings.

—Professor K. Swaminathan

You, your family and friends are cordially invited
to join us in commemorating the
52nd Anniversary
of
Sri Ramana Maharshi's
Mahasamadhi

on

Sunday, April 14 th, 2002

11 a.m.

The program will include puja, recitations, bhajans and readings followed by a lunch.

Location:

Hindu Temple Society of North America
Community Center
143 - 09 Holly Avenue
Flushing, Queens, NY 11355

TRAVEL DIRECTIONS TO THE COMMUNITY CENTER

By automobile: From Manhattan, take the Midtown Tunnel to the Long Island Expressway. Exit at Kissena Blvd. (Exit No. 24), and turn left onto Kissena Blvd. Travel approximately 1 mile, then turn right onto Holly Ave. Travel four blocks and you will see the Community Center on your left.

***From Long Island*:** take the Long Island Expressway (1-495 WEST) and exit at Kissena Blvd. (EXIT No. 24). At the second traffic light turn right onto Kissena Blvd. On Kissena Blvd. travel approximately 1 mile, then turn right onto Holly Ave. Proceed four blocks and you will see the Community Center on your left.

From other areas: Take any one of the highways most convenient to you — The Belt Parkway, Brooklyn-Queens Expressway or Grand Central Parkway — and then get onto the Long Island Expressway. From there, follow the directions given above.

By public transportation: Take the IRT Flushing Line (No. 7 Train) from Times Square and get off at the last stop — Main Street, Flushing. Take the Q27 Bus from Main Street; it will go on Kissena Blvd., and turn left onto Holly Ave. Get off at the 2nd stop just before Bowne Street, walk one block and you will see the Community Center on your left. The bus ride is about five to ten minutes.

For more information:

Arunachala Ashrama, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center
66-12 Clyde Street • Rego Park, Queens, NY 11374
tel: 718-575-3215 • email: Ashrama@aol.com

122nd Jayanti of Sri Ramana Maharshi

"You who wish to celebrate the birthday, seek first whence was your birth. One's true birthday is when he enters That which transcends birth and death – the eternal being" —Sri Ramana Maharshi

Sri Ramanasramam

This was a memorable visit to Arunachala-Ramana for me. I performed *Giripradakshina* on December 29, singing Bhagavan's compositions.

Bhagavan's Jayanti celebrations were grand this year, as ever. They were attended by a very large gathering of devotees. There were special programs of music in the evenings of December 30 and 31. The Ashram wore a festive look with elaborate and artfully-arranged flower decorations. The program began at 4 A. M. on December 31 with Veda *parayana*. The Tamil *parayana* took place in the morning and included *Ramana Stuti Panchakam*, and concludes with "Ramana Sadguru". The *puja* to Bhagavan was attended by a very large gathering. Bhagavan's Samadhi Hall was full, and many stood for hours outside the hall to witness the *puja*, a memorable event indeed.

I had a unique experience on Jayanti day, early in the morning. I was doing *pradakshina* of Bhagavan's *samadhi*. There were about twenty devotees doing *pradakshina* at that time. It was around 5 A. M. A dog entered the Samadhi Hall from the door on the north side (the well side), near the *pradakshina* square. It quickly proceeded towards the other side of the hall where there is the door to the Mathrubhuteswara Temple. I presumed that the dog would enter the temple and then go out from there. But what happened took me totally by surprise. The dog took a right turn, entered the pradakshina corridor, quickly completed a circuit and left the hall from the same door from which it entered before many could notice it. I was only a few feet away from this special devotee of Bhagavan when I saw this happen.

I did not know whether this special devotee was an Ashram inmate doing his daily *pradakshina* or a *siddha* who came in this form to Bhagavan on the Jayanti day. No doubt, Bhagavan's Grace is not limited to mere humans, but available to all.

Suryanarayan
I. I. T., Mumbai

Arunachala Ashrama, New York

For devotees, Sri Ramana Maharshi's birthday is an occasion for great rejoicing, to imbibe Bhagavan's teachings and seek his grace in the company of fellow devotees. Arunachala Ashrama, New York, celebrated the Jayanti on January 6, 2002.

The proceedings commenced with all devotees joining in to the mellifluous tones of Bhagavan's "Aksharamanamalai" with the refrain "Arunachala Siva, Arunachala Siva" that never fails to lead one to the silence of Arunachala.

The video *Guru Ramana – His Living Presence* — featuring interviews with a dozen devotees who moved intimately with Bhagavan and interwoven with archival photos, videos and soul-stirring music — was recently completed and will soon be available for the benefit of all of Bhagavan's devotees. Dennis Hartel briefly talked about the video and screened a portion in which Sri Ramanananda Saraswati, former president of Sri Ramanasramam, outlined his remarkable life and introduced the video.

Bhajans followed, starting with the children who sang a composition of Ramaswami Iyer, author of the 'Saranagathi' song. Sri Martin Wolfe presented a most meditative rendering of the "Bhaja Govindam" of Sri Sankaracharya, exhorting one to struggle and overcome desire and fear by realizing the Self in one's own Heart. Many others also rendered *bhajans* with deep devotion. The program ended with "Upadesa Saram," "Arunachala Pancharatnam," and *arati*, accompanied by Vedic chanting. Everyone then had Bhagavan's prasad in the end, prepared as usual under the able stewardship of Savithri Mohan. The atmosphere was that of an extended family, reuniting for the birthday of the Father.

One hundred twenty-two years ago, a blind

midwife saw a flash of light just as Bhagavan was born into this world. May that light of Bhagavan's grace completely efface our ego, just as the light of the *arati* destroys the camphor, leaving no residue.

V. Swaminathan
San Francisco, CA

Arunachala Ashrama, Nova Scotia, Canada

The 122nd Jayanti of Sri Ramana Maharshi was observed on Dec. 30, 2001 at Arunachala Ashrama in Bridgetown, N. S. Devotees from Halifax arrived in the morning to the warm greetings of Darlene Karamanos and Joe Beninati, who had prepared the temple for the celebration.

For us who had driven to the Ashram in the middle of our Canadian winter, it seemed as if we were driving to Kailash itself, with the mountains that define the Annapolis Valley being reminiscent of the Himalayas. The falling snow and overcast sky, which was present during our journey, dissipated as soon as we reached the Ashram, replaced by a clear sunny sky, as if nature itself was welcoming us on this auspicious occasion.

Sri Bhagavan's statue was garlanded beautifully by Darlene, and in that serene presence the recitation of the Sri Chakra Puja was done.

The presence of Sri D. Sreenivasan and Srimati Lalita, along with their daughters Dr. Bharati and Dr. Vidya, was very much appreciated as they recited the "Sri Lalita Sahasranaamavali," joined also by Srimati Vijaya Sharma.

Dr. S. Swaminathan, who had also traveled from Halifax, offered the *naivedyam*. Dr. Swaminathan had the great privilege of having Sri Bhagavan's *darshan* at Arunachala as a young boy, and his company was inspiring for us all.

After the completion of the *puja*, *prasad* was served, and we felt grateful to Sri Bhagavan for allowing us to gather at his feet and remember him in our heart of hearts.

Dr. Anil Sharma
Nova Scotia

On this occasion, in different parts of North America, groups of devotees had celebrations in their homes. Srimati Mangalam Kalyanam sent us the following from her home in Newman, Georgia:

We celebrated Sri Bhagavan's 122nd Jayanti at our Newman residence on 29th Dec. The function started at 11 A. M. with the chanting of "Aksharamanamalai" followed by the recitation of "Upadesa Saram". Then we all sang the "Kummi Song" (written by Sri Sadhu Om) depicting the life history of Sri Bhagavan. The joyous strains of the song set a wonderful tone for the entire satsang. This was followed by *puja* with the chanting of "Sri Ramana Astotram" and *arati*. Later *prasad* (lunch) was served to all.

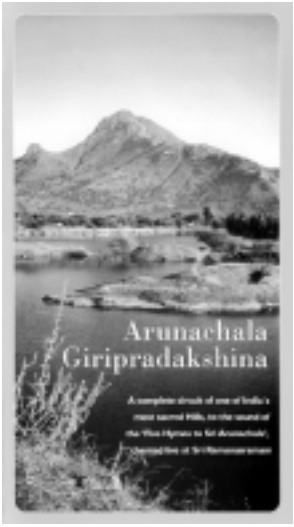
Sri Udayshankar played the Chitra Veena in accompaniment to all the recitations, and later his wife Radhika rendered a beautiful song while Sri Udayshankar accompanied her on the Veena.

"You Are That Which Never Moves"

One day Bhagavan was looking at me intently and said: "It looks as if you are still hankering after meditation." I replied: "What have I got except endless work in the kitchen?" Bhagavan said with deep feeling: "Your hands may do the work but your mind can remain still. You are that which never moves. Realize that and you will find that work is not a strain. But as long as you think that you are the body and that the work is done by you, you will feel your life to be an endless toil. In fact it is the mind that toils, not the body. Even if your body keeps quiet, will your mind keep quiet too? Even in sleep the mind is busy with its dreams."

I replied : "Yes, Swami, it is as natural for you to know that you are not your body as it is for us to think that we are the body. . . . Why can't I remember always that I am not the body?"

"Because you haven't had enough of it." He smiled. *—from Ramana Smriti*



Price $20.00

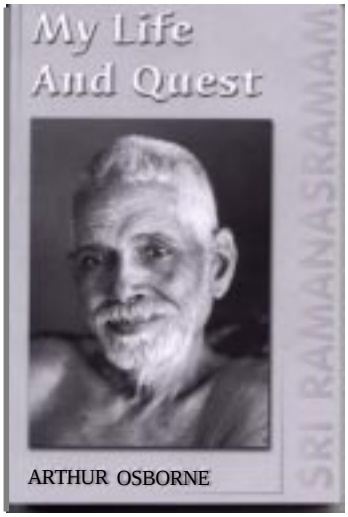
Arunachala Giripradakshina

VHS *(color, music, 54 minutes)*

The Arunachala Mountain is situated 125 miles southwest of Chennai in the State of Tamil Nadu, South India. It is known as one of the most sacred places in India, and now in the West its fame has grown as the home of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, known also as the 'Sage of Arunachala'.

To perform Giripradashina (going around the Hill in a clockwise direction), with mind fixed on the Mountain, is perhaps the most spiritually beneficial act that anyone can perform.

This video takes the viewer on a complete circuit of the Holy Hill, with visits to the hallowed shrines that surrounds it, accompanied by the *Five Hymns to Arunachala,* as sung by the devotees of Sri Ramanasramam.



Price $10.00

My Life and Quest

By Arthur Osborne

Arthur Osborne, one of the most ardent and well known of the devotees of Sri Ramana Maharshi, was the Founder-Editor of *The Mountain Path*, the spiritual journal published by Sri Ramanasramam. He is well known as the editor of *Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi* and the author of *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge,* as well as other books.

This newest publication of Sri Ramanasramam, Arthur Osborne's autobiography, also contains 47 pages of his poems.

The candid description of Osborne's personal struggles and his spiritual fulfillment, along with his moving portrayal of the spiritual ministry of Sri Bhagavan, offers a wealth of inspiration.

Ramana Satsangs

Satsangs with recitations, songs and meditation have been going on in a few places near large cities. Some of them are weekly, others monthly. If you would like to attend any of these and meet followers of Sri Ramana Maharshi in your area, please call or write for more information.

Boston Area — David & Anna Klegon (617-928-1487 /dklegon@rcn.com)
Detroit, Ann Arbor Area — Prashanth & Shobana (734-327-0109 / prashvis@hotmail.com)
Atlanta, GA Area — Mangalam Kalyanam (706-846-5620 / smoothcutter@hotmail.com)
Washington, D.C. Area — Prakash & Mamtha Adiseshan (703-502-4892 / adiseshan@worldnet.att.net)
Miami, Ft. Lauderdale Area — David & Janet Rubinson (954-755-4758 / Arunahill@aol.com)
San Francisco Area — Swaminathan & Sangeeta (510-324-1160 / Nachiketas@hotmail.com)
Toronto, Canada — Krishen & Padma Sastri (905-849-6005 / psastri@hotmail.com)